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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

when salt water breaks

by

(C) Beth Munroe Hill

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFULMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

Department of English

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1987

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "when salt water breaks" submitted by Beth Munroe Hill in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English.

Beth Alves
.....
(Supervisor)

.....

.....

Date: August 27, 1987

for my mother and father

Kathyrn Brookman MacDonald
William Raynor Munroe

Abstract

"when salt water breaks" is a collection of poetry which explores the ways in which women define and express themselves in and through language. The poetry creates an intertext woven from threads of the expression of inner and outer reality; the poet's private voice is juxtaposed with voices of other women heard in the everyday world. Verbal relations and human relations connect in the play of language, releasing poems of sorrow and celebration.

Acknowledgements

Some of these poems have appeared in Whetstone, blue buffalo, NeWest Review, The Antigonish Review, and The Pottersfield Portfolio; some have been broadcast on CBC Radio's Alberta Anthology.

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Introduction

When salt water breaks rhythmically against a shoreline, energy is released from the liquid surface tension. When salt water breaks from the eyes, sorrow is released in tears. When salt water breaks out on the surface of the skin, perspiration is released, cooling the overworked, fearful, or feverish body. When salt water breaks from a woman's womb, a child is released from her body and delivered to the world. All of these connections to salt water are at work within the poetry of this collection. The woman/poet gives form to her salt-watered experiences, and by so naming them is released into new beginnings and celebration.

My geographical connection to salt water is an important one. Born on Cape Breton Island, as were my mother and father, my grandmothers and grandfathers, I hold the notion of island, land completely surrounded by water, above all others in placing myself. When I return to Cape Breton shores and immerse myself in the Atlantic, I experience at-one-ment with the sea, with my self. My childhood was filled with swimming, boating, and fishing. Over and over again these facets of early life surface in my poetry; they become vehicles for expressing what comes from deep within. The body of language surrounding my life holds the same fascination for me as the body of water surrounding the island. I find myself fishing the depths of etymology, listening for the rhythmic ebb and flow of voices, and acknowledging the power of the sea of language. My family lines and my lines of poetry are anchored geographically and metaphorically in salt water.

My break with salt water came when I married a mathematician and moved with him to his home in Alberta. This relocation introduced me to prairie people and landscape. Through his family connections and through the birth and raising of our family here, I have assimilated prairie spirit into my life and my poetry. Perhaps this influence manifests itself most obviously in my poetic style, which strives to be spare and uncluttered like prairie topography. Despite the richness and satisfactions of life in Alberta, however, the dislocation and distance from my extended family, from the sea and language of home, express themselves in salt tears of homesickness.

Recently the relationship which brought me here has ended. More tears, fear-induced sweats, more unbearable tensions created by emotional distance. Pain and anger surface in the poetry: the abrupt short line and the violent image embody the rage and brokenness which I, and others like me, must survive when facing the death of a long-standing marriage. It was during this difficult time I began to make progress in claiming my own power as a woman, as a writer. Nurtured by the strength inherited from my mother and grandmothers and from women friends, I began to find, in the sisterhood of women, and in the literature of women writers, connections to the struggles, dreams, and stories of many women. In the matrix (from the Latin "mater", meaning "womb") of language shared by women, I began to find that common ground on which women stand and from which they speak, that place of our connection.

For me, the word "matrix" provides useful insights into the origins and processes of my writing. In its biological context, the matrix is the intercellular substance in which connective tissue is embedded. As poet I become surgeon, cutting into the body to find and examine such connective tissue. At the same time, the body of language provides the matrix-womb, nurturing fetal poems, creating the poet/mother who gives birth to new life (art, self). I see myself in the roles of surgeon and poet, traditional male domains, at the same time defining myself as mother.

A second meaning of matrix, in a mathematical context, is an array of elements which, when combined, can form new sums and products. My role as poet/mathematician is to find in the matrix of language new connections among elements which can produce new poetry, fresh expressions. Here I appropriate the role of mathematician for myself while, perhaps ironically, rejecting the old role of mathematician's wife. I revel in the combinations and permutations revealed in the matrix of language.

A third definition of matrix, in a geological context, is the natural material in which a fossil, metal, gem, crystal, or pebble is embedded. I come from a long male line of pick and shovel Cape Breton coal miners, and this tradition can represent the process by which I dig into language to investigate what is under the surface of words. I discover treasure in the matrix; gems attract my interest and energy. I begin to write with a sense of wonderment at the richness of the dig.

The Greek-derived word "heuristic" meaning "to find" best defines this approach to my discovery of poetry. In the search, possibilities present themselves. I must allow mystery, paradox, serendipity, and play, must remain open to where such seeming randomness takes me. I remind myself to respect what is happening in the process of working on each poem. Time and time again, when a new connection is discovered, I experience that moment of insight which I imagine to be like Archimedes' bathtub-moment; in his excitement, we are told, he ran naked through the streets shouting "Heureka!" In my excitement, I take the leap from the waters of language (womb) into the streak of creative energy which becomes, after much hard labour, the new poem.

As a collection, the poems do not represent a fixed, linear order. I understand the poems' relationship to each other in terms of an intertext woven from the threads of what constitutes expression of inner and outer reality, the life of dream and memory, the life expressed in the private, personal voice, and in the voices of other women heard in the day-to-day world. Generally speaking, the poems relate to each other in pairs: sometimes one poem speaks to the other on the same subject but in a different voice; sometimes the ideas in one stand in opposition or contrast to those of the other; sometimes one poem merely contains a seed out of which the next poem grows. And always the intertext attempts to grapple with the on-going re-definition of the self. Re-vision, seeing with new eyes, exposes many facets of the self, many versions of the self, through the encounter with language. The text proceeds and the self evolves: one process

becomes the other. Present circles back to past and returns to present. Tears, sweat, tensions, once secret, appear on the surface, on the line of language.

In this poetry, when I speak in my private, inner voice, the self-important "I" is non-existent. The exploring, tentative "i" resists the privileged discourse of the traditional lyric, the traditional poet/ego. The voice of the "i" becomes one of many voices and claims no corner on "truth". Its goal is authenticity. The poems do not represent an attempt to be "correct": they celebrate contra-diction and play, and promote the search for new forms and voices which push out the boundaries of poetic juris-diction. In the use of found materials, in ludic-rous juxtapositions, in the appropriation of what is not "poetic", the poet searches (with her reader) for new meanings in the intersection of the "far-out" with the "far-in". There is a desire to be open, to laugh at myself as I invite the reader to share the joke, share the process of revelation, to share the private places.

Beth Munroe Hill
Ponoka, Alberta
August, 1987

*

the poet

she is fishing for the poem she has
never dared to write
she thinks she has
hooked it soft flesh tears
just under
the surface

no longer submerged words
surge into the stream
she raises them up they
sparkle in the light
flash in blue-bright element
cool air on their
naked rainbow skins

she reels to see
she has caught herself
pisciform she
struggles caught on the hook at the end of her
line

*

the poetaster

my cat tries to make me believe
she is a poet
she has the right habits
rises early every morning perches on
her typing chair yawns takes her first
drink of the day she

plays with her pen struggles to make
connections
circles lines
doodles tail-ends of old plots
notes from cats she always was rather
musical
nothing i do distracts her from
the passion of her art a lightbulb
flashes on above her head
one fang exposed she
sinks her teeth into the back of my hand

yes she's a bold one <u>poets must be bold</u>
she tells me gives the tooth-holes a
rough-tongued lick <u>you see</u> she adds a
wicked kitty-gleam in her green eye
<u>i need to taste flesh before i can
write about it</u>

*

remembering

weeping birch
outside our darkening window whispers
kisses drift the half-light we
lie together form the
accustomed geometry of
beginning memories of
when we were
young and
shy and
in love

*

solitaire

night after night she
can't sleep
his quiet breathing stirs a
single wisp of neck hair
gnaws nerve ends
can't sleep she
steals from bed
seeks reprieve in the ranks of
solitaire

night after night black
on red red
on black
prim patterns of
neatly ordered certainty on
flat grey tabletop
red jack on
black queen
red queen on
black king
third ace exposed
(perhaps this game will work)
two cards left
two cards
one to keep
one to throw away
perhaps this time she'll have to
cheat

*

out beyond the reach

and this is the way she points her dory
out to sea
out beyond the sandbar
out beyond the reach
and this is the way she pulls
arms outstretched
back arched
feet braced flat against the ribs
and this is the way she gasps
and grips the oars
and fights the combers as they
beat her back toward shore

and this is the way she presses her face
against her sleeve
salt lashings rasp and burn
her cheeks

and this is the way
she staggers back to land
beached and shivering
she stands
eyes fixed out to sea
out beyond the sandbar
out beyond the reach

*

leaving the island

it would be night
a bell would be ringing
i would ride the ferry
between the islands
it would be cold i would be
wearing my red bathing suit
we would have to swim the last stretch
to shore there would be
fog on the surface

we would have to jump
mother father uncles aunts
they could swim but
six strokes or
not at all
we would leap
together they would be
gone where are you where
are you i would call

i would be afraid i would be
numb in my red
bathing suit it would be
night a bell would be
ringing

*

the woman above the falls

the man from far away comes
to where i hide he comes
after me long legs
step across rivers climb cliffs
i hide in the jungle hope
he will go away

he waits

i wait

i stand my ground tell him
no i will not listen i do not want him
he comes after me
i run
hands cup his mouth he
calls my name where are you why
do you hide i hide
inside myself i
do not want to be
found

*

waking in a strange place

i am afraid
i am afraid i will lose the key
to the door of my heart
i am afraid a bear will
pick it up
burst in
swing his head from side to side and
sniff my fear

i am afraid
his beady yellow eyes will
hypnotize he will
pounce (he is so quick)
sink curved yellow teeth into my
breast (the stink of his breath)
i am afraid he will
rip me
open

*

one soft spring evening

she returns home from a walk to find
her door locked
in white ice in the light of the
new moon she finds an
axe in the shed begins to
hack her way in she
calls his name <u>are you in there</u>
sweat freezes her hands to the axe handle she
smashes at the door frame swings wild
arcs and screams like an animal
tears scald her cheeks shards of
ice dart past her eyes she
thinks of him
trapped inside

the ice gives
the door bangs open she
runs in to find him a note
pencilled neatly taped to the icebox reads
<u>gone north</u>

*

Saturday night social hour

funny he says he
pushes back his battered stetson hat
you don't look married

married she says in 'ought seven
i was so cold i up and
married me a man married him quick
dumbest trick i ever pulled she
slaps her knee
pours herself another shot of
prime alberta whiskey
yessiree-bob that winter of 'ought seven was one
helluva humdinger

you don't look married to me
he says he sips his second whiskey
i mean you look like you never
needed a man
he cocks his head in thought

needed a man she bolts up straight
i guess i
needed a man
durn near froze stiff in 'ought seven
ice on the shack three inches thick she
measures three inches with thumb and first finger
on the inside i guess i
needed a man

your husband he asks his voice a whisper

picked up with some fancy dame in town
lit our fer parts unknown she slips the whiskey into the
little drawer beside the bed
i guess i
needed a man

and now he asks
his hand finds hers
footsteps clatter in the corridor
their hands tremble withdraw
a nurse appears whisks
him and wheelchair toward the door
and now he calls his voice
thin high

you expectin' a cold ~~winter~~

*

There's a Trick with a Knife

she is
assistant to the knife-thrower
she stands dull-eyed
before the crowd he arranges her
in place dead
centre of his bull's eye he
backs sixteen paces to the rack of
knives

bow at the waist of her
dress flutters in the light
breeze first knife nips
left wrist next snicks
stray curl at left temple
the knife thrower loves to
please the crowd draws
lines of perspiration on their upper lips he
fixes her in his gaze extracts a black
blindfold from his sleeve ties it across
his eyes he waits
to hear their little
cries she
holds her
breath

*

pickle-making

it is fall
she is making pickles

sharp knife
vinegar salt
scalding water
sterile jars

she removes her
wedding rings
places them in the empty
egg-cup

she picks up
the knife
without ceremony
cuts him from
her heart

paring him to
reasonable pieces she
pickles him
twists tops tight
wipes jars
descends to the
cold cellar
arranges him neatly on
one pine shelf

*

a line from Margaret Atwood

And you play the safe game
your rules circumscribed and logical
there is to be no
dancing naked on the high
white window ledge a red rose
shooting from your wrist
there is no taunting of the caged bear no
nimble shift so claws just
graze your ear no
leaping onto firetrucks
sirens tearing night's
black flesh no
wondering if the flames will make you
laugh or
cry
And you play the safe game
while i
hang on hooks above you
knowing i could
never do
the same

*

Preparation and Dressing of Lobster if not to be Served Whole

Plunge
Live lobster into
Boiling water
Head first
Add salt
Cover
Keep pot boiling 20 min.

Plunge
Cooked lobster into
Cold Water
Take meat from shell thus:

Chop off claws
Split body lengthwise
Throw away stomach (small sac
Just back of the head)
Pull out intestinal canal (it runs
From stomach to tail remove entirely)
Crack claws
Take meat
Eliminate creamy green fat (the liver)
Discard spawn found in
Females

Arrange meat
Attractively

*

this is just to say

i'm going
not goodbye
not arrive derci
just going

not thinking
not talking
not doing
just
going
red or
white or
green or
feathers
or moonbeams
or horse-shit
just going
to Mexico or
Kapuscasing or
crazy

up yours

this is just to say

*

amo
amas

decline:
first person singular imperfect
I used to love
i used to love in
the past

first person plural imperfect
we used to love now
we
decline

*

when i was a fencepost

barbed wire bit deep
scarred my heartwood
hooked me to
another post
wind leaned me to the
ground snagged wires held me in
pain

you came with your
bright axe you
split me to
kindling teepeed me into a
circle set me
ablaze i burned
blue red gold
danced sparked in the darkness

now i am a flame
aflame

*

the dream

i go from room to room empty
hear a woman crying she is crying for her dead
husband i find her sitting on the bed smoking
a cigarette my husband stands by the window
his back to me hands in pockets he says
nothing at all

the fire alarm is ringing they think there is a
fire i know it is only her smoking on the bed
she moves toward the window
looks down my husband is helping her out i think
he is going to push her
i cover my mouth to keep from
screaming i sit
still on the bed there is no fire
the alarm is ringing
she is gone

he is turning he is
looking at me hands in pockets he says
nothing at all

i hear her crying from
somewhere below he is dead dead dead
smoke passes between
me and my husband

the alarm is ringing
there is no fire the bed
is burning

*

talking in dreams

chasing after the firetruck i
stumbled on your grave
your lonesome grave
what a surprise to see you
this time of night
you said

just going
to the fire
i said
bare-assed
and a bit
out of breath

i used to do that too when i was a girl
don't get burned at the fire

don't worry mother
i called
and ran toward
the flames

*

my father is a fireman

volunteer retired
in the nights when fires used to start
the whistle pulled him from her bed
fumble of underwear and socks he was
gone
she waited the house
silent her breathing
timed with each third heartbeat her
hand resting where
just a moment before
his body lay
as if to keep him safe
and close
beside her

my father is a fireman

volunteer retired
in the nights when fires start
the whistle stirs him from his sleep
first impulse to rush away to fight
old fires which haunt
his dreams still burning
in memory he reaches for her
to say goodbye to say
he will be home soon his
hand searching where
not long before
she lay safe
and close
beside him

*

ironing

i find myself this tuesday morning
ironing this set of clothes
everything hand-picked to go
together she was
particularly fussy about
ironed underwear and i wonder if
all mothers before wrinkle-free were
like this or was it just her
drive for perfection that enslaved her
hours at the board pushing
sad irons over mountains of
whites palms burned red feet
aching tuesdays were always
ironing days

this morning faced with her
underwear slip dress i
stand at the board

she used to warn me about
clean underwear in case something happens
an accident something too fearful to
name clean and ironed she'd say as if
such sacred vestments would keep me
safe from any evil

she kept one set of clothes neatly
packed in an old black case you never know
when you might need to take a trip she said
and you'll have to go

i lift up the slip
slide its flesh-colored body over the end of the board and
begin to press this slip
fancier than i'd ever seen her wear
suppose she thought it a small reward for
years of housework and
frugality

i'd always chafed at ironing told her she was
silly to fuss over such
details so much to do that was more
important for years she persisted but
finally saw me wash and wear and
didn't speak of ironing again

i lift each item from the case make it
perfect as i can dis-
connect the iron shocked by its
sharp spark

i gather up her clothes press
them to my face still warm
this last gift of
ironing from my hands
to her

*

vision

my father is disappearing
into the eye clinic the sight of him
stepping through that door he
doesn't see stumbles on the
threshold uncertain he
steps with care regains his
dignity lost just for the
wink of an eye

Glaucoma Clinic the sign reads
glaucoma tongue
shapes the new word voice
shakes first time he
says it out loud
glaucoma range of vision
tunnels darkness
closing in

i see him
eighty-one years forty of them my
father the vision of
what it means to
love a child range of
possibilities clarity of
feeling touch of his
rough hand

for years he worked underground dug coal in
dark tunnels pick and shovel
loaded ton boxes 60 cents a ton
20 tons a day he and Alec (brother
Alec eighty-three and
blind)

the cause of glaucoma is
an increase in pressure
in the eye

underground bright flame in
coal oil lamp meant methane gas an
increase in pressure run (don't stumble) before
explosion bright flash in the eyes

sometimes he falls into
depressions eyes fill he

sees visions of my mother she
filled his lamp at night before his
shift every night but
saturday saturday they went
dancing they were
high steppers then

in the glaucoma clinic
his first instinct to
run but he stands then picks his way with
care takes the necessary steps
laser beams bring down
pressure bright flash
just for the
wink of an
eye possibility of blindness
disappears

once again he
steps across the threshold (don't
stumble) at the sight of him
my eyes fill he reaches for
my hand <u>care</u>
<u>to dance</u> he says

*

Thomas and Nain

home from work in the slate quarry
Thomas finds her
pressed against the back corner of the fence
crumpled paper bag
wind-driven
caught
pinched eyes stare
down at the ground

Jesus is coming for me today
she assures the dahlias
good black taffeta flaps at
black stick legs
white hands hang
empty at her sides
Jesus is coming for me today

gently Thomas leads her back
along the slate walk
into the house
his battered hands press her into
the green wing chair by the
window she stares
astonished
at the parlor

Jesus is coming for me today
she assures the plaster cat
leaning forward her flat black church hat
perched a crazy angle
Jesus is coming for me today

Thomas brings her white tea and
buttered bread folded over
he sits on the low stool
beside her

the clock ticks

the quarry whistle shreiks

the dead stare from the mantle

she looks up
she holds him with a gaze
reserved for strangers
absently pinching soft bread between
thumb and first finger
she rolls a tiny bread ball
holds it to blue lips in
thoughtful communion
Jesus is coming for me today
she assures him

Thomas stares at his scarred hands
split nails
split slates
layered lives blasted from quarry face
grandfather
father
Thomas lifts the blue teacup
she sucks the tea
false teeth click the cup
she looks up at him

Jesus is coming for me today

*

Pietá
vision and prayer

slim hope born of woman's womb
heart-print of man
cunning hands raise the high rood
at dawn fling him woundward
at his rest he hangs enduring tomorrow into darkness
and splashed pain

men crown his brow his
eyes blaze bright miracles under
dazzled heaven

this maiden bears him this
stone rolls into her heart
one kiss she gives him her be-
loved in the dark womb of
death her son
lies crouched bare
how she rocks him cries
blind dumbfounding grief her life
wound around his heart her heart
vision-slain driven through the
furied kingdom

*

Peter

she waits curled on the green
carpet by the fire
son Peter leans forward touches his nose to her
soft throat she
reaches up draws his face
close to hers he laughs
the brand-new man's voice
startles her he eases
down beside her snuggles in to her neck that
comfortable place he has loved for
years they watch the fire light
touch of his hand the old cat
purrs drifts off to sleep
dreams him her
little boy again

*

Sarah's pas de chat

dance your birth dance daughter
lift up out of the yawning sea
belly sliced open for your entrance dance
quick turns whirl out from cramped walls caged
thoughts defy
gravity dance
green waves fishes dazzle of
stars dance midnight darkness and
blood

dance little cat
claws teeth you
know them well innocent
brutal

dance daughter
dance sand-castle puddle yellow
sunshine willow your
grace

*

In the spaying process the navel of the female cat is tucked into the fold of the incision. . .

my cat is sad

she quizzles up her little face
head tipped
to one side
green eyes
pensive

she tells me she wants
a belly button of her own

why i ask
would you

they're so (she gropes for words)
wonderful

wonderful i ask

yes she says
wonderful i feel belly buttons (she sighs)
are absolutely mystical
a tie a break perfect
antithesis
eschatalogical genesis

her eyes (wonderful)
gaze off
through the picture window to the
world

*

grade school reunion

gin/
ger images fizz
past traditions (oral and other)
games like
post office (before they went on strike)
played in the dark
ages at the birth/
day party and someone (perhaps it was you)
kissed my
belly button

hey poopsie
the price of stamps just
went up

*

driver

she chucks her bag in back
jumps hard brown body
behind the wheel
(dark-green back-woods Morris)
bangs the tinny door
revs 'er up

sunglasses squared
mirror just right (no cops)
first gear the Morris hops like a fart damn
where the hell is second
a cow looks up
chews once
blue sky winks between the spruces
second keep 'er in the ruts
the Morris whines c'mon you
pile o' junk
third engine drops a tone she
eases back in her seat
soft breeze shimmers
heatwaves on the Brickyard Road

Winding Road sign to the beach
long downhill unravels
two-track back road she
takes a deep breath rams
stick in fourth sun flicks windshield
tires kick gravel
close spruces swoosh intermittent rhythm
she leans one slim elbow out the
window tips back
battered blue camp hat
jee-eez she's
Queen of the Road

*

for Beverly

me and you be sisters
we be the same
me and you
coming from the same place
way inside
me and you
writing lines
scratching our heads like
crazy me and you
got men got
troubles lordy lordy
gotta laugh them off
gotta love
us gotta
ring that bell and
sing
hallelujah
me and you be
sisters

*

National Geographic Smell Survey September 1986

answer the questionnaire ask others
to wait remember
there are questions on both sides don't be
offended ask yourself
if you are a woman
whether you are
pregnant remember odors
may be influenced by age physical
condition sex and much
much more

let the smells arouse you let your
longing your
sadness your
passion be a
rose in the parlor
fish on wooden barrows on the wharf salt
sweat on your lover's body remember
there are questions on both sides

do you currently
smoke tobacco have you been diagnosed as having
hypertension bursitis morning sickness have you
experienced a loss of
smell of babies after baths of
libido and how would you describe
yourself (in parentheses) in Ponoka in
love circle
one number for each
question and what is your
age are you left-
handed alone don't be
offended remember there are
questions on both sides

how do you rate how do you
measure the smell of
tension Central High certain
men certain
women in different situations what do you
say to yourself when smells
arouse you
answer to the best of your
ability

*

Mamie Mac's Washday

I used to make up dreams
before that day
too tired to dream at night but
that day just a Saturday
hangin' out the wash (ten kids my God the clothes
them youngsters go through in the run of a week
and my Alec pick 'n shovel man clothes stiff with
pit dirt and sweat) well like I said
I used to ~~like~~ like to make up dreams
before that day
I was gettin' to the bottom of the pile
pickin' up the last work shirt shakin' it out
when Mother of God what do I spy but an ear
lyin' in the bottom of the basket

now the kids play tricks on me
(little devils that they are)
likely its rubber I think to myself
but its real enough
delicate and innocent just lyin'
in the bottom of the basket
must have been in Alec's pants pockets
he's always got smoke butts or screw nails or
some fool thing to bugger up my wash
so I ask myself how Alec would come by an ear
I mean the man's got the temper of Satan himself
but he'd never do the likes of this
not even drunk
likely he'll have some big story for me tonight

    well now Mamie he'll say
    ol' Phonse took another fit in the tavern tonight
    mutilated himself somethin'
    wicked out of the goodness of me heart I took the ear
    off his hands
    what else would you have me do

I'm standin' at the line wonderin'
what to do next when
curiosity gets the best of me (it always does)
I pick up that ear ginger-like a shudder
goes through me from head to toe
it's as waxy as the flesh of the dead

I throw a glance around the yard makin' sure no one's lookin'
and give it a sniff just the faintest whiff of
nutmeg I squeeze it a tiny twig and Virgin Mary
a band starts playin' music beltin' straight out of that ear
quick I shove it into the pin bag and stuff my apron in on top
that band don't stop the tuba's doin'
ba ba ba bums of McNamara's Band (McNamara used to be my
maiden name you know)
I stand there kinda stunned for a time
Mama always said when somethin' was gettin' your goat
just pretend it ain't even botherin' you
I haul a breadcrust out of my pocket and feed the goose (she
follows me around when I'm hangin' out the wash)
I stand there waitin'
clothes flappin' in the sou'east breeze (great dryin' day)
after a long while everything goes quiet and still
I can hear Sean and the young kids up the far pasture playin'
hoist your sail

I check my own ears just in case
they're both still fastened on tight as the skin on an eel
I wonder if maybe I been
makin' up dreams again (mind I was feelin' a mite
queer in the head when I was puttin' them clothes through the
wringer) I look around
just a Saturday morning in May
just like any other day
the house the yard
the clothes line the chicken coop everything
just the same as it always was

I take a deep breath and say a prayer to the Virgin Mother

> Holy Mary I promise not to
> make up dreams I always knew deep down
> I was playin' into the devil's hand
> wicked it was to make up dreams to get myself
> through the days but I
> solemnly swear Holy Mother I will never
> make up dreams again
> and keep my mind on my work
> and think Holy Thoughts

I pick up
the clothes basket
the pin bag
and start headin' for the house

*

three sheets to the wind

i pin sheets to the line
sheets white pristine
prop the line to
keep the sheets from
dragging i
raise my arm poised
wait for words
from underneath i
prop my mind against the line
reach up i can barely
touch the edge i
want to write
you your exhalation
stirs the sheets
your breath your
inspiration

*

you breathin'

you
breathin' my name
with a sigh
and i
fly to the moon
laughing high gold notes
twinkling the night sky
a woman
comin' through the
just a
poop-diddley woman on a
souped-up broomstick
comin' through the
sigh you
breathin' my
name

*

dream whip

dream of you leaves me
wide awake body
wanting you beside
myself i
get up in dim light
wander to the half-lit
kitchen window winter
snow moon smooth white
curves body in
reflection
i find myself half a
bowl of dream whip take
spoon from drawer remember
you along my back taste
smooth curve hollow of your hip
kiss

*

madness of the moon

four in the morning light
pearls white comb on
marble tabletop
pink-tinged dawn softens
comb to harp
i hear music bare feet
brush sea-green linoleum
dancing i glance back
the white comb
abandoned by your hand
so carelessly to
lunar magic

*

moments like this

you me
black highway
in the flicker of passing car lights i meet
your eyes
last turn before the exit you
touch my cheek
yes i say silently
yes

*

connection

telephone rings
i pick it up we make
connection
you laugh two thousand miles away connection
thread of voice between us the line we reach out
miles across the gap i can barely
see you at first then
putting myself gingerly on the line catch a
glimpse of your green umbrella
you balance your
loneliness on the line make your way
to me
the line trembles between us we
recover the balance keep
eyes on each other you smile
two thousand miles away

we pause we don't want to break the connection

*

beginning of summer

lights across the bay wink in
pink dusk one big
fishing boat putters in the distance slices
water's surface black wake lines slide
under the edge of
break softly on the
pilings my mind and
overhead a jet cuts a
white vapour trail perfect
perpendicular to the
far shore the sky
neatly halved
silver eyelash moon
silhouetted hilltops

from somewhere a radio
plays artie shaw
grace notes float out over
the surface
drift up rest on the
inside curve of the
moon

Vita

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PUBLICATIONS:

Some of the poetry of this collection has been published in the following literary magazines:

The Antigonish Review
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NeWest Review
The Pottersfield Portfolio
Whetstone

Some of the poetry of this collection, as well as one short story, have been broadcast on CBC Radio's Alberta Anthology; one long poem was commissioned by CBC Radio and broadcast on Up And Coming.